

Raleigh, N.C. - Congressman David Price (D-NC) today joined Governor Bev Perdue and Major General William Ingram, adjutant general of the North Carolina National Guard, at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new North Carolina National Guard Joint Forces Headquarters. Price, who has worked for years to bring a new facility to North Carolina, was instrumental in boosting the funding for the Army National Guard account in the federal recovery package passed earlier this year. Construction of the new North Carolina headquarters will be primarily funded through a merit-based award process as part of the recovery package. Price's remarks at the groundbreaking are copied below.

Good morning! Occasions like this are one of the genuine pleasures of the office I am privileged to hold, and I cannot remember many, if any, groundbreakings that I have looked forward to more than this one. This is partly because the North Carolina National Guard Joint Forces Headquarters is such an important project, so much needed, so long overdue. But the satisfaction also comes from the fact that the construction we officially launch today is the culmination of so much effort over so many years by so many people.

Who would have thought when we first began that the funding would finally come from something known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act? Believe me, none of us would have objected to more conventional funding. But as a matter of fact, the fit with the stimulus bill is almost perfect: the project is most certainly "shovel-ready," and it is expected to create or sustain as many as 4,000 jobs.

I will single out only a few people here today, but one surely must be Rep. Chet Edwards, Chairman of the House Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. We knew that if the category of Army National Guard Construction funding was preserved in the stimulus bill, the North Carolina project was at the top of the National Guard's list. It was Rep. Edwards who made sure the category was there in the House bill, and that it was restored in conference after the Senate dropped it. We would not be here today if not for his efforts.

We also benefitted from bipartisan support from the North Carolina congressional delegation, including Senator Kay Hagan, who urged her leaders to accept the House position on National Guard construction funding. I want to thank Tommy Ross of my staff, who worked skillfully to thread this particular needle.

And then there is General Bill Ingram. General Ingram has many skills, but this project demanded all the political savvy and persistence he could muster. It is not a simple matter to understand or break through the National Guard bureaucracy, but he has spent countless hours doing so, with the results you see here today. General Ingram and his staff have been an indispensable resource for congressional efforts to move this project forward.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Governor Beverly Perdue. Both as Lieutenant Governor and as Governor, she has been a champion of North Carolina's National Guard and a leading force in making North Carolina, as we like to say, the most military-friendly state in the nation. The outcome of the BRAC process is a testament to that leadership, and today's groundbreaking represents the latest chapter. Governor Perdue has been a tireless advocate.

Our National Guard will not be the sole beneficiary of this new headquarters building, for the facility will also serve as the nerve center for the Guard's partners in providing our state's disaster response and homeland security capabilities.

The North Carolina National Guard has been called upon more than their fair share over the last few years, and they have answered that call every time – with dignity, honor, and an enduring commitment to excellence. Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, the North Carolina Guard has deployed over 15,000 members to serve in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other missions around the world.

On this Memorial Day week, we honor this service and sacrifice. In particular, we mourn 1st Lieutenant Leevi Barnard of Mount Airy, killed in action in Baghdad last week, the eleventh North Carolina Guardsman killed in action since 2001.

The Guard is constantly called upon to respond to disasters like hurricanes, floods, ice storms, and wildfires. North Carolina has suffered from more major hurricanes in the last fifteen years than any other state. The Guard has not only helped respond to disasters here at home; they have generously helped other states respond to disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and California forest fires. And on top of all this work, they continue to make time to train counterparts and undertake projects internationally through the State Partnership Program, building capacity and friendships in a struggling post-Soviet state, Moldova, and in one of Africa's most promising democracies, Botswana.

As demand for the Guard has spiked, there has been an increasing need for a new headquarters to house the Guard's leadership operations. The Joint Forces Headquarters will replace an outdated, undersized, underequipped building with a state-of-the-art new facility, allowing the Guard to mobilize the people and resources it needs to meet new and demanding challenges.

But the Joint Forces Headquarters will be more than a home for the Guard. It will also house the State Emergency Operations Center, the Department of Transportation Operations Center, the Highway Patrol Communications Center, and the N.C. Turnpike Authority. The presence of all five entities under one roof will ensure seamless coordination and response in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency, improving security and saving lives.

In my role as Chairman of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, I have particularly worked to ensure that the State Emergency Operations Center will have unsurpassed situational awareness, fully integrated communications capabilities, and the ability to mobilize a rapid and targeted response to emergencies.

Effective, proactive response to both the national security challenges we face and the challenges of a natural or man-made disaster requires cooperation and coordination among a variety of officials and agencies. The North Carolina Joint Forces Headquarters will serve as a model for such cooperation, and there is no question it will make our state more secure.

I am overjoyed to see the shovel hit the dirt, and I am grateful to all those who worked to make this event possible. Thanks and congratulations to all who have brought us to this happy day!

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